

KAMLA JAIN

RELEVANCE OF JAINA ECONOMIC PHILOSOPHY
IN MODERN TIMES

Economic theories that have gained ground in last one hundred years have been emphasizing on production and more and more production, as if it is the panacea for all economic imbalances. The concept of 'economy' which literally means 'frugal' or judicious expenditure of money, 'saving' or the 'use of money' with prudence seems to have no place in modern and current meaning of economics. This emphasis on production for its own sake has led to more and more attraction for consumption. The economics of consumption and the wastage that goes along with it has become an essential aspect of our present day economic system. In fact, our economic system not only allows but glorifies consumerism and wastage. It makes us ponder whether the meaning of economic has changed into diseconomics! The idea of production with the development of science and technology is greatly responsible for the glamorous philosophy of consumerism, which has come to mean that good is equal to goods. In this economic system 'human welfare' has taken a back seat.

These economic theories are now, being debated and questioned by economists themselves as they have not in practice been able to produce the desired result of poverty alleviation or serve the objective of human welfare.

It has to be understood that the culture of consumerism has been pampered too much by two prominent industries, which can rightly be called dissatisfaction producing industries. These are: (i) Advertising

industry and (ii) Fashion industry, which are helping not economic growth but only growthomania. Both these industries have played havoc with our individual psychological life. The craze for newness is the order of the day. This is a society where the needs and wishes of the consumer are manufactured by the producer and advertising further stimulates the craze for consumption. This serious infection of consumerism has led to an alarmingly great environmental loss, the well-to-do out of greed and the penniless out of need are being cruel to our environmental assets. Environment degradation has now become a burning issue for both rich and poor countries. But for those who think of the society as an organic whole consumerism does not have much to offer.

In such a situation Jaina economic philosophy offers an antidote to modern economic thought, which needs to be discussed in detail, but before that, it would be worth noting that the perception of some welfare economists in evaluating the prevalent developmental economic theories are eye-openers and reveal the inadequacies of modern economic systems. Among such political writings the works of J.K.Galbraith and E.J.Mishan and the latest Nobel Laureate Prof. Amartya Sen need to be mentioned. Their works are more like the works of practical ethics than just the critiques of modern economic thought. In mentioning these names my intention is to throw light on the significance of welfare economics versus developmental economics systematically discussed by these economists. However it will be a very lopsided presentation if the name of Mahatma Gandhi as a pioneering thinker of the last century is ignored, who could anticipate the problems with his remarkable farsightness which we are all facing today. These economists who are so well versed with the complicated principles of economic theory have forcefully and convincingly questioned the relevance of the dogmas religiously preached by the Gurus of economic thought. It has paved the way for affluence as an economic ideal and there is no distinction between the necessary and unnecessary and important and unimportant goods. It had ignored the difference between the essential and the inessential, between food and shelter and a fancy house and a luxurious automobile. The urgency of production had replaced the urgency of wants. The economics of affluence has led to persistent inflation, which throws the individual

and family budget out of gear. The concept of free trade and competition, therefore, need reexamination. Prof. Amartya Sen's contribution in the area of welfare economics has significance about social change. This, however, looks like a ray of hope for bringing back Marshall's definition of economics as a "science of human welfare".

To return to Jaina contribution towards economic philosophy, the basket of Jaina scriptures has a full-fledged agenda for the householder or a lay person. It is generally understood that Jainism only promotes a cult of renunciation and perhaps it does not have much to offer for social, familiar and economic life of the householder (*Gṛhastha*). In spite of the emphasis on renunciation, Jaina scriptures, however, give a detailed and a systematic account of the code of conduct of the laity or the life of a good householder in the twelve-fold scheme of vows of the householder called *anuvratas* meaning smaller vows or partial abstinences. In this twelve-fold list some of them throw light on social and economic balances of the life of the individual and how his life can be best led. Here, it would be relevant to touch upon those vows that have economic implications and which refer to our material needs and desires. In other word those, which refer to limitation of our desires and possessions.

The fifth vow of *sthula parigraha parimāṇa vrata* or *aparigraha anuvrata* clearly suggests a durable solution to economic imbalances. This is the principle of limiting one's possessions (*parimita-parigraha*) and limiting one's desires (*iccha-parimāṇa*).

This is not a rigorous principle of self-control of a recluse or an ascetic whose life is completely delinked from society. It is a realistic, rational principle with its solid foundation in the social system. This has individual moral growth as its basis with direct relevance to society. Its main thrust is on society consisting of balanced individuals.

The term *aparigrah* is just the opposite of *parigrah* which means 'to amass', 'to accumulate', 'to compile', 'to seize', 'to hold', and 'to receive or accept gifts'. It is defined as that which entangles one from all sides. (*Parigahanam Parigraha*) *Parigraha* has two implications according to Jainas (i) *Bāhya* (outer) meaning worldly possessions (ii) *Abhyantara* (inner) meaning attachment, *aśakti* or *morca*. Both these implications together refer to an attitude of mind towards material objects. These are not two kinds of *parigraha* but are actually two

components of *parigraha*. *Parigraha* thus means not only possessions but also possessiveness. The concept of *Bāhya* (outer) and *Abhyantara* (inner) are very exhaustive when we see the different classifications of *parigraha* in the Jaina texts. The class of *Bāhya parigraha* and its subclasses include *jada parigraha* (implying objects such as clothes, house and money etc) and *cetana parigraha* (implying living beings such as wife, children and servants etc.) and the class of *Abhyantara parigraha* includes abstract realities or emotions such as wrong notions, laughter, afflictions, fear and disgust etc. They really give very extensive meaning to possessions and possessiveness ranging from gross to very subtle objects of desires that need to be curbed.

Thus a complete view of *parigraha* is required for fighting the menace of present day problem. The term 'icchā' is also close to *parigraha* meaning desire to possess. This is perhaps a stage even prior to 'mūrchā' since *iccha* materializes in possession and possessions then propel or drive the individual to attachment or *mūrchā*. Thus, *aparigraha* would logically imply *amurcha*, *parigraha-parimāṇa*, *parimita-parimāṇa* and *iccha-parimāṇa*. Jaina texts give equal emphasis to both the components. At some place *mūrchā* is defined as *parigraha* (*tattvartha sūtra*) and at another place gross material possessions such as clothes, house, jewellery etc is called *parigraha* (*bhāṇḍopakarāṇa parigraha*).

Here, it would be of some philosophical interest and analyze some other concepts, which are seemingly similar to *parigraha* or *iccha-parimāṇa*, but no finer analysis they would reveal some basic differences. These are the concepts of *tyāga*, *dāna* and *santośa*.

To begin with *tyāga*, which is essentially renunciation of possessions and *aparigraha* is non-acceptance of possessions not needed. The stage of *tyāga* comes after one has already accumulated possessions. This essential difference at the origin of these two may lead to different kinds of social systems. (Next) *dāna* is considered a very important virtue in Indian classical literature. It means giving gifts, donations or charity. And *aparigraha* as said earlier is non-acceptance of possessions; *dāna* is thus closer to *tyāga* than to *aparigraha*. It seems to be a feudalistic virtue whereas *aparigraha* is a socialistic virtue. If *aparigraha* becomes a social reality then *dāna* as a virtue becomes meaningless. A believer in *dāna* may justify limitless accu-

mulations first and then give in charity to the needy later. It may even lead to an attitude of superiority in the donor and a feeling of inferiority in the donation. The virtues of equality and justice would take a back seat. Thus, *dāna* should be understood and practiced only as an interim virtue in an ideal society. Therefore, *dāna* is not quite at par with *aparigraha*, which puts human dignity at the highest level.

Lastly, the virtue of *santoṣa* (contentment) as one of the *niyamas* of Patanjali Yoga System is closer to *aparigraha* than *dāna*, it is an observance, a form of practice, which the individual has to adopt. Infact, it is the adaptation and continuous practice of *aparigraha*. It is a stage when *aparigraha* sets in, or is fully established. It is not a temporary but a stable psychological state of *aparigraha*.

In the present context, as I am trying to see these virtues in social perspective, *iccha-parimāṇa* seems to be the most appropriate term out of the many terms used for this vow as it depicts the true essence of the vow since possessions and the desire to possess are interrelated and that basically one has to control one's desires and not merely one's possessions.

In the detailed account of this vow of the householder his possessions are categorized into five. These are (i) *Ksetra-vastu* (farms and houses), (ii) *Hiranya-suvarna* (gold and silver), (iii) *dhan-dhanya* (wealth and corn) (iv) *dvipada* and *catuspada* (bipeds and quadrupeds) (v) *kupyā-dhatu* (other requisites such as utensils and other household articles) articles (*sravaka-pratikramana-sūtra*). This list includes almost everything that a householder needs for himself and his family for a normal living in the society. The householder considers it his duty to limit his possessions and curb his limitless desires voluntarily. It is this voluntary control, which is needed in the present day consumeristic society. The householder on his own resolves not to keep possessions beyond a certain limit, which he is supposed to observe in letter and spirit i.e. through mind, speech and word. (*mānasa, vāca, kayika*). At the present time he is not supposed to interfere in the desires and possessions of others or forcefully impose any such limitations on others or even on his family members. This vow of limitation of possessions is only for himself. This is in keeping with the true spirit of voluntary self-control emerging from within rather than imposed on him from without any compulsion or

force. *Upasākadasaṅga sūtra* cites the examples of limiting of possessions by prominent *upasākas* (householders) such as Ananda but there is no reference of Ananda asking others to curb their possessions.

Further, if an individual violates the boundary line of his possessions as per his vow regarding all the aforesaid categories he commits what is called an *aticāra* (transgression). He realizes this acknowledges this in his daily prayer. This shows that he reminds himself daily of any transgression of this vow. In fact, this is not only individually significant but also socially relevant as these prayers are often held in groups.

Again, in the twelve-fold scheme of the householder's vows the seventh vow called *upabhoga-paribhoga parimāṇa vrata* is also contextually very relevant. The text of this vow very explicitly suggests how the householder voluntarily imposes limits on the articles of daily use and consumption and also on articles that are sparingly used. Uncontrolled and repeated use of the same expensive articles would reflect his uncontrolled desires for material objects. The terms '*upabhoga*' (objects of consumption) and '*paribhoga*' (repeated use of the same objects of luxury) throw light on object related control and desire related control. It is worth noting that if *icchā-parimāṇa* is determination, *upabhoga-paribhoga parimāṇa* is its implementation. The detailed text of this vow discusses the major, minor and even very small objects of use, which are to be limited by the individual. A list of twenty-six items of use, which require control, is given in the text. It would be worthwhile to mention some of them such as: (i) towels for daily use (*ullanīya vidhi parimāṇa*) (ii) Tooth-paste, brush etc. (*danta dhavan vidhi parimāṇa*) (iii) herbs etc. to keep hair cool and clean (*phala-vidhi parimāṇa*) (iv) use of water for bathing (*majjan vidhi parimāṇa*) (v) paste etc. to keep the skin smooth (*uvatana vidhi parimāṇa*) (vi) linen and garments (*vastra vidhi parimāṇa*) (vii) cosmetics such as sandal wood, saffron etc. (*vilepana vidhi parimāṇa*) (viii) use of flowers (*puṣpa vidhi parimāṇa*) (ix) use of ornaments (*abhuṣaṇa vidhi parimāṇa*) (x) sweets, confectionary and other delicacies (*bhakasana vidhi parimāṇa*) and many others such as shoes, chappals, sandals, modes of conveyance such as horse cart, motor car, beds, tables, chairs etc. This detailed list gives us an idea of how such as self-control can be of help in both environment-protection and anti-

consumeristic drive. Observance of these limits would be the best way of showing our eco-friendliness and concern for human welfare. It should however be noted that the aforesaid list is not to be understood just in the literal sense but only in real sense.

Again, to reinforce the essence of the aforesaid ideas of the above vows, in the eight vow of the householder i.e. *anarthadaṇḍa viramāṇa vrata*, there is a clear guidance for avoidance of mindless and unlimited accumulation of objects of consumption and their limitless use of showing our desires and attachment of accumulated objects which may be instrumental in provoking a violent attitude.

This brief account of Jaina householder's vows suggest that in his daily routine the householder has to be cautious in his outward discipline as well as in controlling his desires and attachments and to limit his possessions.

The Jaina texts also have reference where the well-to-do *śravakas* (householders) distribute their wealth and possessions if they cross their set limits. The *Śravaka Pratikrāmaṇa sūtra* of Śvetambaras and the *Ratnakārandaravakācāra* of Digambaras present more or less similar pictures of a householder's life as it ought to be.

Before I conclude, I would like to mention some fundamental presumptions of *iccha-parimāṇa*. Firstly, the source of happiness and peace lies within the individual not outside him. Secondly external possessions are only meant to be used and not to be owned. The ownership actually lies with nature which is the true caretaker of everything. Ownership as 'mine' and 'yours' is simply a source of conflict. Thirdly human individual has tremendous energies and potentialities, which are not based on external possessions. So the role of possessions is only limited in the life of the individual.

The general purport of this paper is to suggest that the fundamental problem of economics of 'unlimited wants and limited means' has a solution in Jaina philosophy in the detailed descriptions and explanations of many of the vows of the householder which not only suggests limits on external possessions but constant monitoring of the related desires. This economic philosophy of Jainas is the true welfare economics starting with the individual and then leading to a positive impact of society.

To conclude, thus *aparigraha* or *icchā-parimāṇa* is not an

abstract philosophy, it has a therapeutic solution to modern life of tensions and anxieties. For social reconstruction, infact, the survival of human society voluntary control of desires and personal possessions is the only solution. Amassing of wealth for its own sake will only increase disparities leading to unavoidable evils of mental restlessness, jealousy, envy, corruption or crime. The middle path of *icchā-parimāṇa* would check both poverty and affluence with the motto that possessions are only means and not ends in themselves.